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INL Cyber Researcher Appointed to Homeland Security Task Force

IDAHO FALLS, Idaho – Janet Napolitano, secretary of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, recently appointed INL cyber and control systems security researcher Rita Wells to a 15-member cyberskills task force.

The group, chartered with developing a set of recommendations to help DHS and the federal government recruit and retain talented cybersecurity professionals, outlined an 11-point strategy during a meeting with Napolitano last week. The report coincides with National Cybersecurity Awareness Month, which is sponsored by DHS and runs through Oct. 31.

Among the recommendations, the report calls for DHS to establish a two-year, community-college-based program that identifies and trains large numbers of people for critical cybersecurity jobs, establish a cyberreserve program that would allow cybersecurity professionals outside of government to assist DHS in times of need, and to launch a sustained effort to train and hire military veterans for critical cybersecurity positions.

“We are committed to working with our partners at universities and throughout the private sector to develop the next generation of cyber-professionals to protect against evolving cyber threats,” said Napolitano. “I appreciate the task force’s hard work and dedication to helping us build a safe, secure and resilient cyberspace.”

Wells, an INL employee for 22 years, is currently the program lead for the lab’s electric sector security programs. She is the recipient of numerous cybersecurity awards including the SANS Institute’s supervisory control and data acquisition (SCADA) security leadership award. She is a regular invited speaker at national cybersecurity conferences, and has provided testimony to Congress outlining the current state and challenges of cybersecurity in the electric utility sector.

Wells was joined on the task force by several well-known cybersecurity professionals including Jeff Moss, chief security officer for the Internet Corporation for Assigned Numbers and Names (ICANN), Alan Paller, director of research at the SANS Institute and Joe Sullivan, chief security officer at Facebook.

For nearly a decade, INL has been internationally recognized for its research capabilities in critical infrastructure protection, cyber and control systems security, and electric grid reliability. The laboratory manages several multiyear security programs, including the DHS Industrial Control Systems Cyber Emergency Response Team (ICS-CERT) and the Department of Energy’s National SCADA Test Bed.

Both programs perform research, lead training and conduct large-scale demonstrations to improve the security of private-industry computer systems that operate critical infrastructure such as the electric power grid, oil and gas refineries and water treatment facilities.

INL is one of the DOE’s 10 multiprogram national laboratories. The laboratory performs work in each of DOE’s strategic goal areas: energy, national security, science and environment. INL is the nation’s leading center for nuclear energy research and development. Day-to-day management and operation of the laboratory is the responsibility of Battelle Energy Alliance.

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